



CAROLINA CONNECTIONS

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NATIONAL FORESTS IN NORTH CAROLINA SEASONAL UPDATE

FALL-WINTER
2012-2013

Revising the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forests Plan

This fall and winter, employees with the National Forests in North Carolina will prepare for the revision of the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan (the Plan).

The process will begin in late 2012 and conclude several years later. During this time, dozens of Forest Service employees will collect, analyze and synthesize information for the three phases: 1) assessment phase; 2) planning phase; and 3) monitoring phase. The public will have numerous opportunities to provide comments.

When revision is completed, the Plan will guide management of the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests for approximately 15 years. The Forest Service published the original Plan in 1987. A significant amendment was published in 1994, and smaller amendments occurred in subsequent years.

Information on the current Plan (before revision) is posted online at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/landmanagement/planning>, click on "Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests."

Each national forest and grassland is governed by a management plan in accordance with the National Forest Management Act. These plans set management, protection and use goals and guidelines. Monitoring conditions on a forest insures projects are done in accordance with plan direction, and determines effects that might require change in management.

A new Planning Rule, unveiled by the Forest Service in April 2012, will guide the process for revising the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forests Plan. This means that the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forests Plan will be among the first forest plans nationwide to be revised under the new rule.

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Safety Tips for Hunters

Hunting is a favorite recreational pastime for many fall and winter visitors to the national forests in North Carolina. To ensure the safety of themselves and others, hunters should practice the following safety tips:

- Check weather reports before visiting the forest.
- Tell someone where

you will be hunting and when you will return.

- Be familiar with the area you want to hunt.
- Dress properly and be prepared for the worst possible conditions.
- During certain seasons, hunters must wear hunter orange

viewable from all directions.

- If accompanied by a dog, the dog should also wear hunter orange or a very visible color on a vest, leash, coat or bandana.
- Check hunting equipment before and after each outing, and maintain it properly.

(cont'd on page 6)

Fall and Winter at the Croatan

Despite cooler temperatures, there are plenty of activities at the Croatan National Forest during fall and winter.

Hitting the OHV Trail

Unlike off-highway vehicle (OHV) trails at the other national forests in North Carolina, Black Swamp OHV trail is open year-round.

There are eight miles of trails for OHV enthusiasts to enjoy. Trail bikes and all-terrain vehicles with a wheel base of less than 50 inches are permitted. Daily permits are sold at the trailhead and cost \$5. Visit the ranger station to purchase a season pass for \$30.

Follow these enforced forest regulations for treading lightly on the land:

- All-terrain vehicle (ATV) and motorcycle operators must wear DOT-approved helmets and eye protection.
- Children under 8 may not operate ATVs or motorcycles. An operator under 16 must have constant supervision by an adult over the age of 18.
- No passengers are allowed on ATVs, unless vehicles are designed to carry passengers.
- Unlicensed vehicles are not allowed on designated Forest Service roads.
- Spark arresters, mufflers and brakes are required for motorized vehicles.
- Alcoholic beverages are prohibited on all trail systems or in recreation areas.
- Travel only on OHV-designated routes. Cross-country travel is prohibited.
- Don't ride during or immediately following rain.

Prescribed Burning at the Croatan

The U.S. Forest Service conducts prescribed burns in the fall and winter at the Croatan National Forest.

Wildfire has been part of the coastal ecosystem for thousands of years. The agency uses prescribed burning as a management tool to mimic what periodically occurs in nature. Many areas of the Croatan National Forest are burned every three to five years, so the fire program at the forest is

ongoing.

Prescribed burning, combined with planting and thinning operations, is helping to restore longleaf pine forests to their historic range. So far, the agency has restored about 15,000 acres of the original 60,000 acres of longleaf in the Croatan National Forest, where the goal is to restore 150 acres annually. This is part of a region-wide effort by the U.S. Forest Service to restore the longleaf pine tree across the South.

Prescribed burning benefits native plants and animals including endangered species like the Red-cockaded woodpecker and the rough-leaf loosestrife plant that call the Croatan National Forest home. Insectivorous plants like the Venus Flytrap and pitcher plant also benefit from fire. Numerous native species need fire in their habitats to reduce competition from invading species, and to add nutrients back into soil.

Prescribed burns reduce the build-up of woody debris in the forest, which creates a safer environment for communities surrounding the forest and protects public infrastructure. The practice reduces the chances of a catastrophic fire from occurring.

The Forest Service also conducts prescribed burns during the growing season to imitate nature. These maintenance prescribed burns usually take place every five years or less.

Prescribed burns are completed by trained personnel in accordance with an approved, detailed plan that includes an environmental analysis. Contingency measures are also included in the plan. Fortunately, escapes from prescribed burns are rare.

The safety of the public and firefighters is the number one priority. When prescribed burns occur, the Forest Service closes area trails and roads, usually the day before the prescribed burn. The public is asked to heed signs posted at trailheads and roads and to stay away from burn sites and closed roads and trails.

The prescribed burning program at the Croatan National Forest is helping to restore the forest today and for the enjoyment of future generations.

Cheoah Ranger District

Visitors who enjoy backcountry hiking will love the Cheoah Bald area in the fall and winter. Cheoah Bald offers a high-quality, remote hiking experience with high-elevation views, grassy balds and cascades. The area is located east of Robbinsville, N.C. It offers 13 miles of hiking trails, including sections of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and Bartram National Recreation Trail.

Folks who enjoy roughing it may consider taking in the fall foliage with a stay at Swan Cabin. The primitive log cabin has nine rope-strung bed frames for friends or family members in sleeping

bags. Built in 1931, the three-room cabin includes a wood stove for heat. There is no electricity or running water. Water is obtained from a spring a quarter-mile away and must be boiled. A privy is in back. There are many recreational opportunities in the area including hiking and hunting. Rent Swan Cabin for \$25 a night through the end of December by calling 877-444-6777 or online at www.recreation.gov.

In late winter, the Cheoah Ranger District conducts prescribed burning for a variety of purposes such as reducing woody debris, preventing catastrophic wildfires and promoting habitat for native plants and animals.

Nantahala Ranger District

Friends and family can enjoy fall colors in the Blue Ridge Mountains while staying at the district's [Balsam Lake Lodge](#). For less than \$200 a night, visitors can relax in this fully accessible cabin that offers 16 twin beds and linens, a kitchen with utensils and three bathrooms. Call 877-444-6777 or visit www.recreation.gov to make reservations.

The [Wayah Bald Tower](#) is a popular place to take in scenic vistas during any season. From the 5,385-foot summit of Wayah Bald, the stone structure pro-

vides views of the Great Smoky Mountains to the hills of Georgia. The historic tower is restored to its former glory after receiving much-needed repairs.

The Nantahala Ranger District offers dozens of trails for fall and winter hiking trips. [Whiteside Mountain](#), for example, offers a two-mile loop trail that climbs above 750-foot high cliffs. Whiteside Mountain Trail is rated "more difficult" because of its steepness. At more than 4,900-feet in elevation, the mountain provides outstanding views to the east, south and west. Winter brings cold temperatures and icy conditions to Whiteside Mountain so be safe when hiking and bundle up.

Tusquitee Ranger District

Fall and winter are great times to visit the Fires Creek Recreation Area as there are fewer people compared to other times of the year. Huskins Branch Hunters Camp offers primitive camping for those who want to rough it. There are more than a dozen trails around Fires Creek Recreation Area. Take in the fall foliage from the scenic Backcountry Area, which includes the 25-mile Rim Trail. Rim Trail is a hiking trail, but some trail sections are open to horses.

Equestrians can camp at the Bristol Fields Horse Camp, which is open all

year long. The camp offers nine sites and access to 19 miles of trails in the Fires Creek area. The nightly camping fee is \$5. Fall temperatures in this area range from the 40s-60s. Winter temperatures range in the 20s-40s. Bristol Fields Horse Camp sites are available on a first-come, first-served basis only.

Before heading to the woods this fall, hunters can practice their rifle skills at the Panther Top shooting range. Open year-round, the 100-yard range also accommodates pistols. The cost to use the facility is \$2 a day or \$25 for a season pass. The shooting range is located off State Route 1303 outside of Murphy, N.C.

Appalachian Ranger District

This fall, probably in December, employees will move into the newly constructed Appalachian Ranger District office in Mars Hill. The address is 632 Manor Road, Mars Hill, N.C., 28754.

Max Patch is one of the best places in the Appalachian District to enjoy the fall colors. At 4,629-foot elevation, this mountain bald offers 360-degree vistas of Mount Mitchell to the east and Great Smoky Mountains to the southwest. The bald sits next to the Tennessee state line in the Harmon Den area. The area is perfect for picnics; however, camping is prohibited. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail crosses this area, so hiking is popular at Max Patch.

lar at Max Patch.

After winter arrives, some cross-country skiers head to the trails of [Roan Mountain](#) on the east end of the district. Snow often blankets the 6,286-foot high mountain, enabling cross-country skiers to travel through the forest, similar to those found in Canada. There are stunning views from the top of Roan Mountain. Ski or hike on Cloudland Trail, a 1.2-mile path that runs from the parking area to the Roan High Bluff Overlook. The gate at Carver's Gap is closed during the winter, so visitors will need to hike or ski to the recreation area. When visiting Roan Mountain in the winter, dress warmly as cold temperatures, combined with the wind chill, will make for a chilly outing.

Grandfather Ranger District

The Grandfather Ranger District offers several areas that are ideal for viewing fall foliage either by car touring or hiking. The Highway 181 corridor in Burke County traveling north offers a stunning view of Table Rock and Brown Mountain. There is a road-side viewing area where travelers can stop and enjoy the colorful fall foliage and get out and stretch their legs. Two interpretive signs describe the view to the east and west. For viewing fall foliage by foot in McDowell County, make the short 1.3-

mile hike to Kitsuma Peak to enjoy a stunning view of Ridgecrest, Young's Ridge and Allison Ridge. The Point Lookout Trail out of Old Fort also offers opportunities to view fall foliage. This three-to-four mile paved trail is open to pedestrian and bicycle use. For longer car touring on Forest Service gravel roads, try the Watauga Turnpike which offers views of the Lost Cove/Harper Creek areas.

One of the premier car-touring roads in the country, the [Blue Ridge Parkway](#) is also accessible from the Grandfather District and features a number of scenic overlooks.

Pisgah Ranger District

Fall and winter hiking opportunities abound in the Pisgah Ranger District. With more than [100 trails](#), the district offers paths of various skill levels where visitors can get away from it all.

Hikers should be prepared by carrying a map and compass. Dress appropriately for the weather conditions. Carry plenty of water. Hikers should not hike alone and give their trip plan to a friend or relative. Also, visitors should know whether the trail they are on is for hiking only or if equestrians or mountain bikers use the trail too.

When hiking, [practice trail etiquette](#). Travel responsibly and respect the rights of others.

While black bears slow down during the colder months, they do not hibernate. Remember to be "bear aware" by storing food in a tree or in a bear-proof container, and practice other [bear safety measures](#).

During the fall and winter months, the Pisgah Ranger District may conduct prescribed burns to mimic what would occur naturally. This forest management technique reduces woody debris and helps prevent catastrophic wildfires. Prescribed burns also improve wildlife habitat. The safety of firefighters and the public is top priority.

Enjoy Fall and Winter in the Piedmont

New Forest Plan

Visitors to the Uwharrie National Forest this fall and winter probably will not notice that the forest is operating under a new plan. Last May, the U.S. Forest Service unveiled the revised [Uwharrie National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan](#) (the Plan) that promotes forest restoration and protects waterways. The Plan guides management of the 50,814-acre national forest for the next 15 years. The previous Plan was signed in 1986.

"We are excited about ushering in a new era for the Uwharrie National Forest and focusing our efforts on restoration of some unique ecosystems in this area," said District Ranger Deborah Walker.

The major themes of the Plan are: restoring the forest to a more natural ecological condition; better management of cultural resources; and providing outstanding and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities, with excellent trails and facilities.

Fall Colors

While some folks consider the mountains to be the best place in North Carolina for leaf viewing, residents of the Piedmont know that the Uwharrie National Forest comes alive in the fall. Oaks, hickories and other deciduous trees offer brilliant shades of orange and red every autumn. Drive along Badin Lake to see the vibrant colors reflect off the water and enjoy temperatures that are several degrees warmer than the mountains.

Camping during the Colder Months

When many campgrounds close in the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests around the end of October, outdoor enthusiasts may be left wondering where they can camp in the fall and winter. At the Uwharrie National Forest, all campgrounds are open year

round. Both [Arrowhead](#) and [Badin Lake](#) campgrounds offer dozens of campsites. Visitors can stay the night and wake up to the crisp, fresh air of fall and winter.

"The Uwharrie National Forest offers a variety of recreation experiences throughout the year," said Walker.

Equestrians can bring their horses and stay at the [Canebrake Horse Camp](#), which features 29 campsites with electricity, access to many miles of trails and other amenities.

Fall Firewood

Every fall, the Uwharrie National Forest issues permits for the collection of firewood by local residents. To harvest firewood, purchase a firewood removal permit at the Uwharrie Ranger Station office, 789 NC 24/27 East in Troy, N.C. A permit costs \$20 for four cords of firewood. A permit holder may take a maximum of 16 cords (or four permits) of firewood in a calendar year.

Firewood may not be removed in wilderness areas, active timber sale areas, campgrounds and day-use areas. Only dead and down trees may be harvested; standing trees (live or dead) may not be cut. More information about removing firewood is available [online](#).

Prescribed Burning

The Uwharrie National Forest is a fire-adapted ecosystem. This means that fire has been, and always will be, part of the forest. In the fall and winter, the Forest Service conducts prescribed burns in the Uwharrie National Forest. Prescribed burning improves diversity and habitats for open woodland species such as the endangered Schweinitz's sunflower. Prescribed burning also helps restore longleaf pine woodlands, which were once prevalent in North Carolina. Visitors are encouraged to contact the District office prior to their visit to see if there will be any fire impacts to their favorite recreation area.

UWHARRIE NATIONAL FOREST

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Revising the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forests Plan

(cont'd from page 1)

Land management plans under the new planning rule will include:

- Mandatory components to restore and maintain forests and grasslands.
- Requirements to provide habitat for plant and animal diversity and species conservation. The requirements are intended to keep common native species common, contribute to the recovery of threatened and endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and protect species of conservation concern.
- Requirements to maintain or restore watersheds, water resources, water quality including clean drinking water, and the ecological integrity of riparian areas.
- Requirements for multiple uses, including outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish.
- Requirements to provide opportunities for sustainable recreation, and to take into account opportunities to connect people with nature.
- Opportunities for public involvement and collaboration throughout all stages of the planning process. The final rule provides opportunities for Tribal consultation and coordination with state and local governments and other federal agencies, and includes requirements for outreach to traditionally underrepresented communities.
- Requirements for the use of the best available scientific information to inform the planning process and documentation of how science was used in the plan.
- A more efficient and adaptive process for land management planning, allowing the Forest Service to respond to changing conditions.

More information about the new Planning Rule is available online at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/planningrule/home>.

Safety Tips for Hunters (cont'd from page 1)

- Know how to operate the weapon before using it in the field.
- Carry a spare set of dry clothing. Use layering techniques to prevent moisture while retaining body warmth. Always bring rain gear.
- Carry a first aid kit.
- Clearly identify the target before shooting. Prevent unfortunate accidents or fatalities.
- Put hunting plans in writing (dates, times, location and expected time of return). Leave one at home and one in your vehicle.
- Be alert when hunting near developed areas and trails. Other recreationists are in the forest as well.
- Avoid wearing white or tan during deer season. Wear hunter orange or another highly visible color.
- **Know the state hunting regulations and obtain the proper hunting license(s).**

[Click here to read safety tips](#) that non-hunters can take to protect themselves during hunting season.

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